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**Introduction/Societies View of Cultural Group**

The Southern accent, or drawl as some call it, often gets a bad rap. There are many folks who have a tendency to lump all southerners into the category of “hick”, “country folk”, “red necks”, or, my personal favorite, “country bumpkins”. Many do not realize there are multiple charming dialects and accents heard in the slow utterances of the South. Some people who are not from the south “think that the Southern accent is all one thing. Those of us who live in the south know better” (Kretzschmar, p. 9). Still yet (a fabulous southern expression), people from the south are judged by the way they speak. Southerners are not the only ones to be treated differently due to the way they pronounce things. I happen to like the Southern accent and because I do, Mobile, Alabama, is the focus of this project.

**Rationale**

I chose to study Southern American English (SAE) because I have neighbors who recently moved to Knoxville from Mobile, Alabama. Their dialect is not as pronounced as a typical East Tennessean, so I wanted to see what influences speech in the Mobile Bay area. I grew up just outside Washington, D.C. where there is a plethora of speech patterns to listen to and analyze. Despite being fortunate enough to grow up with neighbors from England, Richmond, VA, New York, and New Jersey, I still experienced culture shock when I moved to East Tennessee for college. The Southern dialect I grew up hearing was nothing compared to what I was surrounded by when I moved to Knoxville. Of course, after fifteen years of being a resident of the south, both in East Tennessee, and in South Carolina near the Georgia border, I have become intrigued by the how diverse the southern voice can be.

**Description of Linguistic Patterns**

Robert Delany notes, “People are judged by the way they speak, and dialects carry different levels of social prestige with them based on the prejudices within a society” (Dialect Map, ¶ 7) There are some people in this world who believe their English is better than everyone else. Despite their high opinions of themselves, there is no such thing as one version of correct English. There are several ways to speak English. The most common English used in formal writing and professional speaking is called Standard English (SE) or Standard Written English (SWE) (http://englishplus.com/grammar/00000374.htm). The Gulf Coast area of Mobile leans towards SAE and has a heavy French influence. In Mobile, words used common to most Southern and Appalachian areas, are used. One common phrase is “ya’ll”. Another is “fixin’-to”. In interviewing Nicole and Eric there is a noticeable /i/ extension in many of their words. For example, the word “my” is pronounced with a heavy accented long vowel /i/ sound at the end. The Language Samples project lists a few of the SAE features. A few I heard in conversation with Nicole and Eric are: the Southern Vowel Shift -which actually causes the vowel sounds to change as in ‘sing’ to ‘sang’; /z/ to /d/ in Contractions like in the word ‘wasn’t’ is pronounced ‘wadn’t’; and monophthongization where a word such to ‘boil’ becomes ‘bol’. (<http://www.ic.arizona.edu/~lsp/index.html>). I could listen to Southern speech all day!

**Historical Background of Dialect/Cultural Group Traits**

The Mobile Bay area is heavily influenced by early French colonization. There is research on the web suggesting British and Spanish influences as well, but the French established the first settlement in the bay area. Mobile Bay is host to a large port, and the interviewee, Eric, mentioned the docks are always busy with shipments of various kinds coming in and going out. The port was originally name Port du Mardi Gras, named for the day of celebration that was happening in France on the day of that Pierre Le Moyne de Iberville and Jean-Baptisit Le Moyne de Bienville set foot in the area (World Book Encyclopedia, pp 275-276). The French brought a lot of customs and ways of life with them. One is the Catholic religion, which is still widely practiced in Mobile according to Eric. Another custom brought to the Bay area is Mardi Gras. Mardi Gras is traditional French, and now commonly celebrated, festival. Mardi Gras, historically, is a long celebration ending on “Fat Tuesday”, the day before Ash Wednesday, or the beginning of lent. Eric and Nicole talked about how the some celebrations begin the Saturday before Fat Tuesday in many areas of the Gulf.

**Classroom Connection**

According to Christian (2007), “A child’s dialect may interfere with acquisition of information and with various educational skills such as reading” (p. 43). Over the past few weeks, I have come to realize the significance of understanding one’s own dialect. Studying linguistics in the elementary, middle, or high school classroom never occurred to me before this class. I have always been respectful of others dialects and culture, but never thought to have students study it. I plan to help guide students in developing a better awareness of their linguistic heritage; even the deaf students. I am already pondering possible projects and activities to help the students link their vernacular to Standard American English to assist their reading and writing.

**Reflection**

This activity was a great deal of fun, but was extremely time consuming. I found it difficult to get all the research I wanted to get done in the four week time span of this class. I did, however, learn a lot about the different types of vernacular and dialects in this country; and I have only just begun! I was surprised to learn that Appalachian English abruptly stops in the Northern Region of Alabama. Middle Alabama and Southern Alabama take on the characteristic of Southern American English (SAE). Just like most Southerners, SAE speakers are fans of ‘fixin’ to” or fixin’ ta”, the double modals like “might could”, and “might should’. In summary, I learned a lot during this four weeks of research and might could research it some more.

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